

## Introduction, the presentation of a problem

The Netherlands is one of the countries which have it harder with migrants in the last decade. True, we have not seen a government falling out of grace due to a terrorist attack, as it did happen in Spain. Nor we have a political party comparable to the swiss Blocher's or the belgium De winter's. At the same time, we are not far from it. The range of the discussion on migrants is broader than in many other countries in the west. From the mavericks of Wilders in the TK to established figures like the princess Maxima, the debate is wide and alive. A big part of the political contentious issues remain associated with "the allochtoon questie". And with the pass of time the issue has continuously escalated in the concerns of the public, reaching the first place in 2007 (21 minutes enquete, version september 2007).

This state of affairs has not passed unnoticed to the analysts of our society. Undoubtedly many studies have been commanded and discussed after the closed, or open, doors of universities, ministries, NGOs and others. Some of these studies eventually leak to the public opinion, and discussions flare. It is doubtless that the allochtoon question has generated a whole field of discussion, with its own experts, gurus, outsiders and insiders.

One of the problems associated with this state of affairs is that the debate itself is mediated by the day-to-day dynamics of public opinion. We are very aware, in a determined moment, which are the contrasting points of view. In the summer months of 2007, for example, a heated discussion was opened by the position of the Minister Vogelaar on the potential islamization of the dutch society in the coming two hundred years. But this was not a new issue for the dutch political debate. Back in 2000 the "islamization of the Netherlands" was high in the political discussion lead by Fortuin and Jaja. Years before this issue was already pressed by Bolkenstein. The important question is what happen in the meantime? In which ways have these debates shaped the way we understand the netherlands and its diverse population?

If one would go on to try to answer this question seriously, a need is immediately apparent. There is no standardized measurement on the influence that the public debate exerts on experts. We actually do not know if the departments of sociology in our universities begun to do research in the allochtoon question in 2000, or in 2007. Or in 1983, for what matters. Worse, we do not know how the opinions of researchers and experts in the field have evolved with the public debate. One could certainly attempt to track published works of known sociologists along time, and try to compare their opinions in time. But the main problem remains: there is no standard measure of the evolution of expert opinions regarding our lively and ongoing debate on migration, allochtonen and multiculturalism.

## A modest proposal: the panel allochtoniavoel

The problem sketched above can be tackled in many different ways. Bibliographical research might bring into attention the evolution of opinions. Research into the funds allocated to sociological research could also give a picture of the changing emphasizes that the discussion has taken. Or in deep interviews with opinion makers might bring into the light the evolution of their own ideas. At the variogroep we have a humble proposal in this direction: the creation of the panel "allochtoniavoel".

According to us the main problem that has to be tackled at the time of understanding the evolution of the debate is the lack of a standardized measure. Standardized along time, that is. Accordingly, what we propose is to organize a panel of opinion makers and experts. A stable panel willing to be questioned with an agreed regularity. A panel that must be able to offer diversity of opinions, but also seriousness of own standpoints. And continuity. And a questionnaire that must cover the broad issue, without falling in common places, nor becoming outdated after a couple of years.

### Detailed structure of the panel

The words opinion-maker and expert are vague words *per natura*. But for the goals of the allochtoniavoel panel, they are not so vague. By opinion-makers we understand the political leading figures that have directed the debate in the past years, and from whom is reasonably to think that will go on doing so in the years to come. We are certainly not talking only of Hirsi Ali or Femke Halsema, but also from columnists like Anil Ramdas or Ephemenco, or analysts like Hoffland. And not only at the national level, but also at the local level. What is important for us is to compile the opinions of individuals that have maintained their attention in the issue. On the other hand, by experts we mean the individuals that in one way or another have maintained a research program on our issue. And again, we do not think only in the researchers allied to the UVA, or the Erasmus University, but also analysts from institutions like Forum, or even heads of consultancy/research bureaus, such as Motivaction. Within this frame we arrive at three different groups: the politicians, the scientists and the opinion leaders.

The background idea of putting together these kinds of involved individuals is that they represent two important forces that do shape the informed debate on multiculturalism in The Netherlands. On one side are the objective observers, the scientists. And in the other side are the public players, both politicians and opinion makers. Both sides are important and have not been regularly researched so far.

## Expected output

Now, some fifty persons have reacted positively to our project. The panel is set, and a questionnaire is developed and validated. The list of questions is sent twice a year, and eventually we collect a database of answers. What do we intend to do with the results?

In first place, the results of such a project should be open to the interested public. In this sense we intend to maintain a web site in which the raw data of the analysis is accessible to other researchers, or interested parties. But that is certainly not enough. We aim to produce a regular report, with the same regularity that the questionnaire is circulated. As any other thermometer fixed in the wall of a weather station, our instrument would become interesting when its measures can be read in a timeframe.

Other products are also possible to imagine. Much is discussed about indexes that measure public -or private- opinion. In economics we count with the Mc Donald index, or in sociology the Eurobarometer. It is possible to imagine that an allochtoniavoel index might be developed. In any case, such products would be thought and discussed after compiling and validating the opinions of the panel.

## Closing words

With the proposal introduced above, we want to put together a relevant piece of missing information in the multicultural debate of today. We recognize that "expert nederland" is not regularly analyzed, certainly not in this issue. The opinion from politicians, researchers and opinion makers comes to the public debate in many different, and ultimately incompatible, ways. We miss a coherent view of the evolution of the debate. The advantage of a regular and unbiased survey is that it could offer a comparative baseline to the debate.